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News release

Media, civil society role in sparking positive change is undeniable: Insights from the Africa Media Festival

The role of media and civil society organisations (CSOs) in shaping public opinion and driving positive change was highlighted at the two-day Africa Media Festival in Nairobi on Wednesday. Under the theme of "Re-imagine Media," the conference provided a platform to explore the latest innovations and forward-thinking initiatives in media.

Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny, Afrobarometer communications and knowledge manager, joined Margaret Mliwa from the Ford Foundation, Risper Onyango from Lawyers Hub, and Jacob Ukumu from Change.org Foundation to explore how media and CSOs can collaborate to create and foster constructive conversations that promote social and political transformation. The panellists gave real-world examples of the power of successful CSO-media partnerships in Africa and their remarkable impact.

"At Afrobarometer, we understand the power of data in transforming media practices. That's why we've been providing training to the media on how to interpret and use our online data analysis tool," Sanny said. "With free and open access to public attitude data, the media has a powerful tool to speak truth to power and hold politicians accountable."

As an example of best practice, Corruption Watch is an innovative media-CSO collaboration between the Ghana Center for Democratic Development and Joy FM. This initiative investigates cases of alleged corruption and brings the findings to the public, applying pressure for guilty parties to be brought to justice while also educating the public on the dangers of corruption.

Mliwa, of the Ford Foundation, cited joint legal action by CSOs and the Media Council of Tanzania against the government when they felt the civic space was being threatened.

On achieving synergies by navigating differences in priorities and perspectives, Ukumu said, "Journalism is basically an amplification of advocacy; the two go together. I can't imagine an environment where one exists without the other."

The panellists also explored the complex interplay between CSOs and the media, especially balancing autonomy and objectivity.

Sanny, a former journalist, underscored the importance of media professionals maintaining their independence while collaborating with third parties: “Don’t compromise your professional ethical standards. Apply your gatekeeping rules.” Onyango also urged participants to embrace alternative channels of media for more impact.

The panellists agreed that CSOs and the media play a vital role in amplifying African voices to create meaningful change. Though their methods may differ, the underlying motivation is the same, as Sanny said: “We all want to be catalysts for change.”

Baraza Media Lab, a co-creation hub that provides space and resources to enable media practitioners and entrepreneurs to collaborate, hosted the inaugural Africa Media Festival in Nairobi on 14-15 February. The festival brought together industry professionals, key players, and innovators from across the African continent to celebrate, share, and explore the power of media in Africa.

About Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer (AB) is a trusted source of high-quality data and analysis on what Africans are thinking. With an unmatched track record of 350,000+ interviews in 39 countries, representing the views of 80% of the African population, AB is leading the charge to bridge the continent’s data gap. AB data inform many global indices, such as the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, Transparency International’s Global Corruption Barometer, and the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators. The data are also used for country risk analyses and by credit rating and forecasting agencies such as the Economist Intelligence Unit. All AB data sets are publicly available on the website and may be analysed free of charge using AB’s online data analysis tool.

For more information, please contact:

Simon Templer Kodiaga

Email: skodiaga@afrobarometer.org

Telephone: +245724434667

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